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**BOB MAGINNIS**
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April 3, 2008

**Corrections chief to send inmates back to the farm**By BOB MAGINNIS ([bobm@herald-mail.com](mailto:bobm@herald-mail.com))

From the 1930s until 1968, inmates at the institution now known as the Maryland Correctional Institution-Hagerstown grew vegetables and raised dairy and beef cattle.

Now a top correctional official is proposing to put inmates in farming jobs again, although what they grow won't be for anyone's dinner table.

Gary D. Maynard, secretary of the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, came to Washington County this week to meet with prison employees and to launch his department's plan to use inmate labor to plant 1 million trees statewide.

Some of the first were planted at an area of Antietam National Battlefield slated for restoration. Many others will be planted across the state, with Maynard estimating it would take two-and-a-half to three years to reach the 1 million-tree target.

The trees will come from tree farms to be set up at various institutions. Governments, churches and nonprofit groups only have to provide the seedlings, some fertilizer and inmates will do the rest, he said.

Maynard said that by doing these jobs and others, such as transforming trash-strewn city lots into park-type settings, inmates learn what he called "soft skills."

Most people, he said, leave jobs because they can't get along with co-workers and/or supervisors. Helping inmates learn how to work within a group and about what is important to employers - showing up on time and respecting fellow workers - will help them transition into the working world, Maynard said.

In addition to the tree plantings, Maynard said that he's working to put together a facility that would rescue thoroughbred race horses.

Inmates would work with the animals to settle them down and get them healthy so that they could be adopted as pets. A thoroughbred association is footing the bill, so there's no cost to taxpayers.

Maynard also addressed a number of prison-related topics, including:

- The probe of correctional officers who allegedly used excessive force at the Roxbury Correctional Institution and the prison in Cumberland.

"This may have come out of one incident at RCI. It looks like they went over the edge. I don't see this as a systemic problem, though," he said.

- Dealing with violent inmates who seem not to care about consequences "is one of our greatest challenges," Maynard said.

The answer is to treat everyone fairly, he said, and show them that positive behavior will lead to good things and that bad behavior will lead to something negative.

It's tough, Maynard said, because many inmates have a lot of anger that the staff must deal with.

- Staffing is an ongoing issue, because correctional officers feel less safe when staff is reduced, Maynard said.

Officers on the tiers tended not to trust outside assessments of staff needs, so Maynard said he'll take a different approach.

"I intend to train front-line people to do these analyses," he said.

- Maynard said that he had no opinion on the death penalty. He said that in his experience, people don't consider penalties before they kill someone.



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"They don't think they're going to get caught," he said.

• The prison system is beginning a new program to increase the amount of information police agencies give the correctional system.

Together with a new electronic case-management system that's been put out for bid, Maynard said prison officials should have a better pictures of inmates' past activities.

• Even though in 2007 Maynard offered inmate labor to do work for Washington County, local officials haven't taken him up on the offer, he said.

"I have the hardest time giving away free labor to counties," Maynard said.

He added that he might have to do what he did in Howard County and force a meeting to get local officials talking about the idea.

Not only does it provide free labor, Maynard said, but it also improves public attitudes about inmates.

"The only way I can change the public opinion about inmates is to put them out in the community. All of a sudden (to the public) they become human beings," Maynard said.

*Bob Maginnis is editorial page editor of The Herald-Mail.*

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